

City urged to think outside the box Author says creativity is a key to economic development.

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San Antonio's history and authenticity may be the keys to attracting the **creative** people it needs to become a bigger player in the growing **creative economy**, but look out for the "squelchers." Those are among the points made by Richard Florida, author of the best-selling "The Rise of the **Creative Class**," who said his research overturns much of the conventional thinking about economic development.

Florida addressed about 450 people Wednesday at a conference sponsored by the city's Cultural Affairs and Economic Development departments. It was the start of a two-year plan to develop the city's **creative economy**.

"If a good business climate was all that mattered, then everybody would be moving to Buffalo," Florida said. "If you look at where companies are going today, it's some of the most expensive cities in the world - New York, Chicago and San Francisco."

Tax incentives, football stadiums and research parks don't matter so much anymore, Florida said. San Antonio's history and authenticity provide what a lot of people do want: a chance to connect with something real.

"To me, the three T's of economic development are technology, talent and tolerance," he said. "But you need all three. Too much emphasis on technology and you wind up like Pittsburgh. Too much tolerance, and you're Miami or New Orleans - great places to visit, but you can't work there."

Florida, a professor of economic development at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh, said his attempt to understand why major companies and entrepreneurs were leaving that city led him to write his book.

His research revealed three main insights:

- * Creativity is the key to economic growth.
- * People are the key ingredient.
- * Companies are less important for harnessing **creative** talent than community and a sense of place.

"People want more than just a good job now," he said. "They want a good job and a good life." He said that many traditional notions about creativity and **creative** people have to be overcome.

"The major obstacle are often the people I call 'squelchers,'" Florida said. "They are people, and every community has them, who try to smash down **creative** energy."

Mayor Ed Garza and Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff opened the conference with optimistic assessments of the city's current **creative** climate.

But both also mentioned the "cultural wars" in the 1990s over the percent for art ordinance, the Esperanza Peace & Justice Center lawsuit and major budget cuts for arts funding.

"Looking back at the challenges and controversies of those times, I think it has to motivate us here today," Garza said. "I think that is why so many of you showed up here today with passion, energy and even anger. But I hope we can think of ways to galvanize all parts of the city and motivate all San Antonians to be **creative**."

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